Desktop management
A driver for Vista adoption?

By Tony Lock, May 2007

Throughout much of the last 15 years a lot of attention has been lavished on the less than humble personal computer, now almost universally revered as "the PC". While there is absolutely no doubt that the PC has enabled much productive, and valuable, work to be delivered it has not been without cost, especially in terms of the time spent configuring, repairing and maintaining such devices. However, in recent years the high cost of looking after the device has caught up with the PC.

A question many organisations are now asking, perhaps belatedly, concerns identifying the best way to deliver "desktop" service to users, and there are now many ways of answering the question. In addition to the standard 'unmanaged', usually Microsoft Windows-based PC, we have now entered an age where alternative solutions may be suitable for some users. Indeed, technology and business needs now ensure that alternative solutions are investigated.

The alternatives include using sophisticated management tools to assist daily PC administration and operations as well as potentially deploying rapidly maturing thin client-type solutions. In the not too distant future it is clear that newer offerings such as SaaS (software as a service) could have some role to play supplying basic desktop office functionality, but it is not there yet. It is also apparent that there will soon be obvious opportunities to bring well established virtualisation solutions to the desktop. The simplicity of deploying a single file containing a user's desktop to whatever PC device is needed quickly and without fuss is certain to attract attention, especially in those organisations that are already comfortable operating virtual machines on their server platforms.

On the question of better management of desktop / laptop machines, this is something that Microsoft has emphasised as one of the major benefits of Windows Vista. With this in mind, it is informative to note the results of some research (yet to be published) that we have recently undertaken concerning the likely adoption of Vista among enterprises. In answer to the question "When do you think you are likely to roll out Windows Vista in your organisation?", fewer than one in 10 of those that take an ad hoc or informal approach to monitoring the quality of service delivered by IT say they will roll out Vista within a year, versus greater than 40 per cent of those at the other extreme that monitor performance across the broad scope of IT service delivery.

This is, perhaps, indicative, that the challenges associated with desktop service delivery are now much more visible than in the past and that there is a growing recognition of the business value delivered by IT in general and the desktop in particular.

I will be writing more on the rapidly expanding range of methods becoming available to help organisations large and small deliver desktop services. In future articles I will consider the current state of affairs, the benefits, challenges and general fit of various approaches to desktop deployment.

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